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AMERICAN DENTISTRY.

ADDRESS

DELIVERED BEFORE THE

AMERICAN ACADEMY OF DENTAL SCIENCE,

AT ITS

TWENTY-THIRD ANNUAL MEETING,

HELD IN

BOSTON, NOVEMBER 12, 1890,

BY

W. W. H. THACKSTON, M.D., D.D.S.,

Of Farmville, Virginia.



BOSTON:

ROCKWELL AND CHURCHILL, PRINTERS.

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283 DARTMOUTH STREET, BOSTON, NOV. 20, 1890.

W. W. H. THACKSTON, M.D., D.D.S., *Farmville, Virginia* :—

MY DEAR DOCTOR, — I have the honor to inform you that at the twenty-third annual meeting of the "American Academy of Dental Science," held at Young's Hotel, in Boston, on Wednesday, the twelfth of November, it was unanimously

Resolved, That the thanks and congratulations of the Society be tendered to Dr. Thackston for his very able and instructive address; that a copy be requested for publication and for preservation among the records of the Academy.

Hoping for your consent to the expression herein contained, I am,

Yours very truly,

EUGENE H. SMITH,
Chairman Executive Committee.

FARMVILLE, VA., NOV. 24, 1890.

EUGENE H. SMITH, D.M.D., *Chairman of Executive Committee* :—

DEAR DOCTOR,—Your kind favor of the 20th inst. to hand, and herewith I beg to submit reply.

Most highly appreciating the estimate of my "Annual Address" by the "Academy of Dental Science," and its complimentary action in asking its publication, while an unanticipated and agreeable surprise, will meet no objection on my part.

The "Address" was prepared solely for the "Academy," and I regard it as the property of that institution, to be disposed of as the Academy may elect or determine.

If, as appears, it is thought worthy, and that publication of the paper in pamphlet form will in any wise advance the interests of "American Dentistry," I not only consent, but shall be glad to see it in print; not, however, from any personal idea of the merit of the address, as I am no judge of what I do in that line, and rely wholly upon the discretion of my friends.

Allow me, my dear doctor, to thank you for the gracious and elegant manner in which you communicated the views and wishes of the "Academy," for which I feel more indebted to your personal regard and professional friendship than to any excellence in the address itself.

With every good wish for yourself, and the continued success of the Academy of Dental Science, I beg to remain,

Faithfully yours,

W. W. H. THACKSTON.

AMERICAN DENTISTRY.

Mr. President and Gentlemen of the American Academy of Dental Science: —

IN attempting to meet the requirements of this important occasion, this commanding assembly of professional men, and in the desire in some measure to fulfil the expectations and requite the high honor it has been your pleasure to confer upon me, I have naturally been embarrassed in the selection of a fitting theme for entertainment, instruction, and professional profit.

“American Dentistry,” — and in the outset I take leave to proclaim that it is no misnomer, that it *is* an entity, that there is such a thing as “American Dentistry,” and that it stands out upon the pages of contemporaneous history in broad and ineffaceable lines, with as distinguishing differences and characteristics as mark the nationalities, the languages, the customs, and modes of thought and expression of the peoples of all civilization. And in saying this, I do not mean to under-rate or disparage anything good in European, Asiatic, nor the dentistry of any other land or people. I remember with gratitude, and acknowledge with pride, the labors, the researches and discoveries of the illustrious men of France, of Germany, and of England, — names imperishable and immortal, — great men working upon different lines to a common centre and end, but all failing to evolve or crystallize a compact and symmetrical department of true and accepted science.

But to resume our line of thought: for fifty years “American Dentistry” has been systematically and steadily making requisition and levying tribute upon all the collateral and kindred departments of science, and upon nearly all the other sources of human knowledge. The “Curricula” of our academies, colleges, and universities comprise all that is considered essential in preliminary education and training, and our standard and current literature teems and overflows with the announcement and discussion of the advances and discoveries of almost each diurnal revolution of the earth.

Most of the old subjects have been threshed and winnowed until hardly a grain is left, and the relatively new ones of Histology, Microscopy, Bacteriology, Pyorrhœa Alveolaris, root-filling, and implantation, comprise a bill of fare of which you are invited to partake at almost each of your daily meals; and, as variety is said to be both spicy and wholesome, I have selected "The Æsthetic Demands of Dental Science" as the base of comment on the present occasion.

Of course, I premise and assume that the first and highest office and prerogative of dental science and practice is the hygienic protection and preservation of the dental organism from disease and decay; its second, such operative and remedial assistance as will repair the lesions and damage of accident or disease, and to restore the teeth as nearly as practicable to their pristine shapes, their original symmetry and beauty of outline, and to comfortable and effective usefulness; the construction of appliances for irregularities and congenital aberrations, and such surgery as may be demanded by accident or diseased condition of the mouth and its appendages; and lastly, the supply of artificial substitutes for partial or entire dentures.

The animus and idea of this address is not only to improve in some degree our methods and material, but to add to our resources, and, as far as practicable, to divest and relieve our operations of the disgust and dread with which they are usually contemplated, and enable us to achieve results, not only of comfort and utility, but of symmetry and beauty, that will reflect credit and honor upon our calling, be a joy to ourselves and a benefaction to humanity.

The relation of the dentist to his clients (who, as a rule, comprise the most cultured and refined of human society) demands that he should be a gentleman, in all that the term or designation implies; his apparel, while not "loud or dudish," should be fashionable, well-fitting and scrupulously and faultlessly clean; his hands and his nails should be the special objects of his care and attention, as few things are more repulsive, and justly offensive, than the introduction of soiled fingers or foul and clouded nails in a human mouth. This may appear out of place in an address to the "Academy of Science;" but I grieve to say that illustrations of carelessness in this particular have distinguished some of our best operators, and made them the subjects of harsh criticism and revolting comment, and reflected discredit and odium upon modern dentistry.

The deportment of the dentist, in his professional intercourse, should be characterized by decision and firmness, tempered and softened by courtly manners, chaste language, and the observance of all the rules and requirements of polite and cultured society. No rudeness of speech and no coarseness of manner should blur or blemish the escutcheon of the accomplished and self-respecting dentist. The dental office, the reception and operating rooms, should be made inviting and attractive in their equipment and appointments; books, pictures, flowers, bric-a-brac, and musical instruments would not be out of place.

Our instruments and appliances should be of the best procurable material and workmanship; our cutters, our knives, lancets, scissors, chisels, and excavators should be kept sharp, and they, and all other implements, should be thoroughly cleansed and disinfected after every operation. The dentist should ever keep before his mental vision the maxim that "cleanliness is next to Godliness." The operative implements and appliances of a dentist should always be kept out of view until required for actual use. A glittering array of sharpened and pointed steel will often shock and appall the timid patient, and be suggestive of wretchedness and torture, rather than relief and comfort.

A careful observance and cheerful and polite attention to the wants and needs, the satisfaction and ease, of patients in the reception-room or in the operating-chair, and an air and manner of gentleness and sympathy with the timid and fearful, will largely disarm the dentist's office and his operations of their terrors, and secure for him the respect, the confidence, and affectionate regard of his *clientèle*.

So much for the characteristics, the qualities and attributes, the appointments, paraphernalia, and deportment of the dentist who would be not only faithful and thorough, but æsthetic, in his professional ministrations and practice.

We will now, Mr. President and gentlemen of the "Academy," consider æsthetics as a practical requirement in advanced operative and prosthetic dentistry. And for striking illustration and comparison, I select the grand, the major, and commanding operation of tooth-filling *with gold*, a metal and material that subordinates and overshadows all else now known and employed in the preservation of decaying human teeth, a metal and material that in purity, effectiveness, and available applications has stood the test of ages, and given to

dental science and dental art their proudest triumphs and brightest laurels. But with all our trust and faith, our veneration and love, for gold as a restorer and preserver of teeth, while it is yet, and has ever been through a long professional life, our "mainstay" and "sheet-anchor," it must be confessed and acknowledged that gold, while incomparably the best-known material that nature, science, or art has yet supplied, is not the "*ideal*" tooth-filling: it is wanting in homogeneity; it forms no adhesion to tooth tissue or cavity walls; and its color, when placed in a human tooth, is out of harmony with nature and with art; and gold, when used as a tooth-filling, should never be unnecessarily exposed or rendered needlessly conspicuous in the human mouth.

It is true that the demands of tooth salvation with our present means and resources often impose the hard and stern necessity of doing violence to the expressions of nature, — our great "model and masterpiece," — and of perverting and infracting the rules and laws of art, of harmony, and taste.

To save a human tooth, — gold being our surest reliance, — we place upon its labial or other exposed surfaces a glittering or a shimmering yellow spot that offends the eye, and changes its whole expression. This we do as a choice of evils, as our best effort for the preservation of organs of priceless value; and we do *wisely* and *well*, though we secure safety, comfort, and usefulness at the expense of harmony and beauty.

We sometimes, with more or less success, make a compromise with what are technically known as "porcelain inlays," secured by the zinc cements, and matching in color and shades the natural teeth; and this practice deserves our commendation as an æsthetic advance, and should be more generally accepted and employed.

But, sirs, what a boon to humanity, what a benefaction to dental science and practice, would be the discovery of the long sought and long hoped for "*ideal*" tooth-filling, — plastic, cementitious, homogeneous, harmonizing in color and shade with the teeth in which it might be placed, unshrinking and unexpansive, unaffected by the secretions of the oral cavity and crystallizing to hardness and durability, imperishable as the tissues, the dentine, and enamel from nature's laboratory! Of what this ideal tooth-filling shall consist, in what alembic or crucible it shall be found, I grieve and lament to say, *I can-*

not tell you; its fortunate discoverer will achieve an immortality coequal with all other great benefactors of humanity. And my selection of the present theme has been mainly for the purpose of awakening the interest and stimulating the efforts and researches of the "American Academy of Dental Science,"—an organization so distinguished for its talent and culture, and so fortunate in its opportunities and environments.

When we remember the marvellous and wonderful revelations of modern and advanced science; when we consider the almost daily illustration of results and achievements in chemistry, in electricity, and in almost all other departments of science and art, that a decade ago were regarded as wild and chimerical, as the unreal fabrics of a disordered imagination; when we witness demonstrations that challenge and stagger the evidence of our senses,—is it absurd or utopian to believe and trust that persistent, intelligent, and wisely directed effort and research may not yet be rewarded by what would be the crowning triumph of the nineteenth century, and one of the grandest benefactions ever conferred upon humanity? I repeat, to what body of "savans," to what organization of earnest, cultured, and indefatigable investigators and explorers in the arcana of nature, science, and art, and to what organization more fortunately circumstanced and environed, can we more hopefully look, as successful searchers for our ideal, and, we believe, yet attainable tooth-filling, than the "American Academy of Dental Science"?

As incentive and stimulus, we see what has already been found in the zinc and vegetable plastics, imperfect and perishable as they confessedly are. And we have, upon the authority of a late distinguished professor in one of the Philadelphia schools, — Elisha Townsend, — the announcement, that from the ancient places of sepulture in the Chinese Empire, human teeth had been exhumed containing fillings of a material or composition perfectly imitating the natural teeth in shade and color, and of a crystalline, adamantine hardness that had not only withstood the wear and abrasion of use and the decomposing secretions, the acids and alkalies of the oral cavity, but all the agencies and influences that had fossilized the teeth in which they were found. We have also the testimony of a credible observer, — Dr. W. George Beers, of Montreal, Canada, — that he has seen and examined such a filling in a tooth in the mouth of a living man, that had been inserted by an operator in the far East, presumably China or Japan.

We know the teaching of our great Text-Book, that "there is nothing new under the sun," and however much or little of importance may attach to the two instances we have mentioned, we certainly know that there are *lost arts*; we know that there are undiscovered things of utility, value, and beauty that marked and distinguished the civilizations of the remote and beclouded past. May not this homogeneous and imperishable tooth-filling have been one of them? and may not its re-discovery emblazon the annals of "American Dentistry," and constitute the grand and crowning achievement of its Academy of "Dental Science"?

It is true we have metallic alloys, plastic phosphates, and vegetable preparations and compositions that subserve a valuable purpose in tooth-saving; but they, as well as gold, lack the qualities and characteristics of "ideal filling," being unsightly, opaque, inharmonious, and, as a rule, less permanent, less reliable, and far more perishable *than* gold; but it must be confessed that these materials are short steps, if not strides, in the right direction, and point the way to our coveted but yet undiscovered treasure.

Within the last few years — less than a decade — our prosthetic department, which had been largely remitted to empyrics and artisans, has been lifted from the slough of professional abandonment and debauchery, rehabilitated, and rendered respectable; it once more assumes its position as an honorable and honored department of our calling.

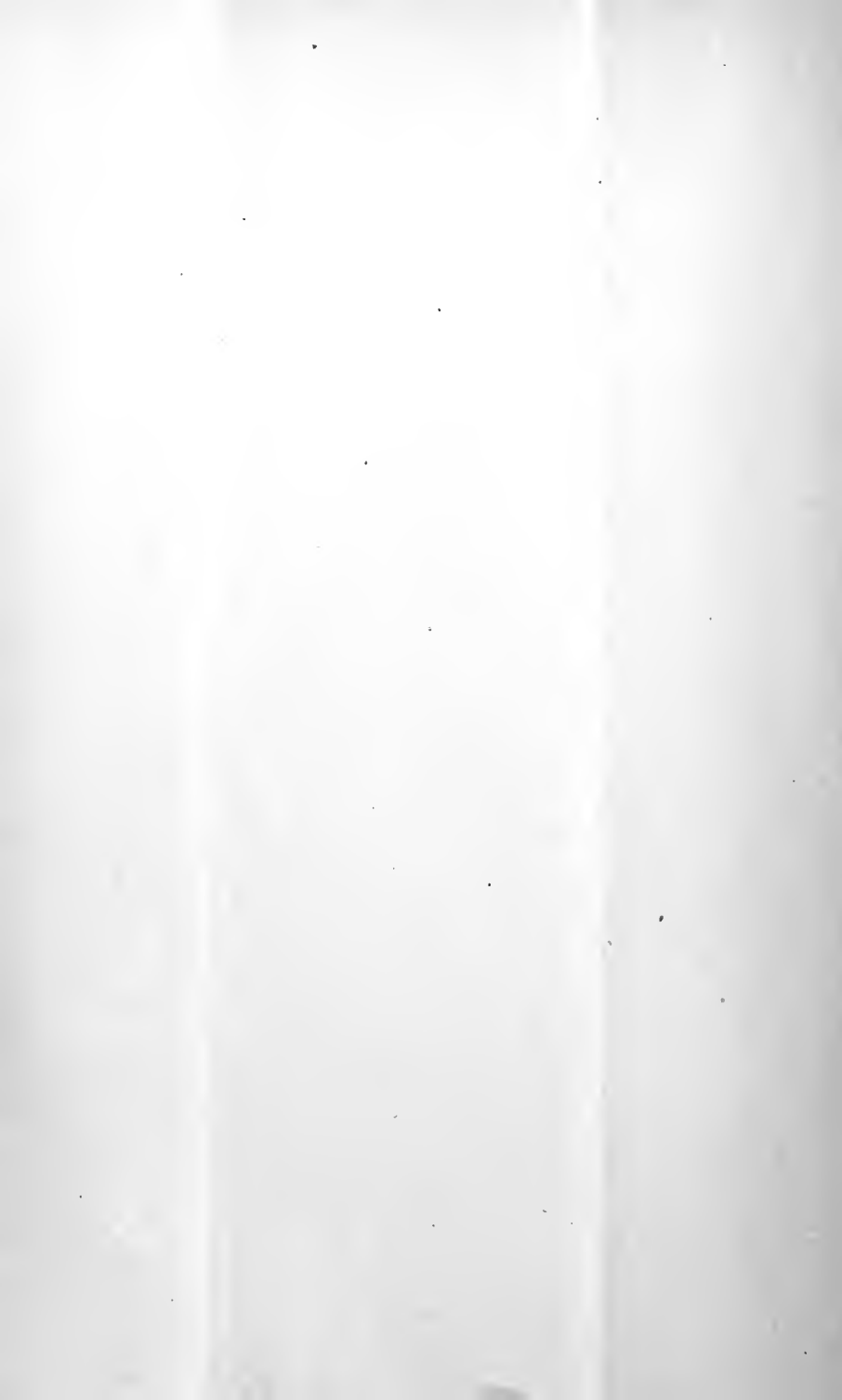
The gold, platina, the aluminum and electro-deposited bases, the capping and crowning of roots and stumps of teeth, the ingeniously contrived and skilfully applied "*removable bridge work*," challenges our recognition, excites our admiration, and commands our approval.

Gold and platina are again dual sovereigns in the dental laboratory; whether they will be dethroned by aluminum, the wonderful new metal, the future will determine.

As I have already intimated in discussing the operation of tooth-filling, whatever metal may be employed in dental prosthesis, whether gold, platina, aluminum, or some of the compounds and compositions, each and all should be kept as far as possible out of view in the mouth. Gold and other metallic bands and crowns are good things, but broad conspicuous bands and solid gold crowns are sadly out of place upon the roots and stumps of cuspid and incisor teeth.

Our ceramic artists, our artificial-tooth manufacturers, supply a far more æsthetic and harmonious tooth-crown than can be made from any of the known metals,—a crown which, if properly mounted, is of equal utility and far greater satisfaction to both dentist and patient. I should not dwell upon or emphasize this point in my address, but since the reintroduction and more general employment of gold in our prosthetic work, I have heard of, and with my own eyes beheld, shocking examples and illustrations of a violation of taste, harmony, and beauty in a polished, shining row of solid gold crowns, mounted upon the roots and stumps of superior cuspid and incisor teeth; and while the work appeared to be mechanically well executed, it of course presented a most horrid travesty of all the rules and laws of æsthetic taste and art, and had been accepted and tolerated simply on the ground that the crowns were gold.

And now, Mr. President and gentlemen, in concluding this address, I beg leave to say that I honor the “American Academy of Dental Science.” I honor the high position it has taken and maintained as one of the most advanced and cultured scientific and professional organizations known in the history of “American Dentistry;” I honor it for its efforts, labors, and researches, and for the contributions it is making to the sum of professional knowledge, and look with trust and confidence to its help and aid in exploring our yet untrodden fields, and in the solution of our yet hidden problems.





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